

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR

OFFICE

GENEVA

Studies and Reports

Series A

No. 20.

April 1921.

International Railwaymen's Congress.

London, November 29-30, 1920.

An International Congress of Railwaymen was held on November 29th and 30th 1920, in London.

The following is a list of the delegates attending the Congress, together with the names of their Organisations, with membership, and the countries to which they belong :—

Great Britain. National Union of Railwaymen (membership 510,000). Representatives : Right Hon. J. H. Thomas, M. P. (General Secretary), A. J. Abraham (President), W. H. Turner, E. G. Anderson, D. Thomas, W. Race, W. Gordon, A. J. Bayne, P. Murphy, A. Matthews, J. Gore, W. L. Brunsdon, W. Dobbie, W. T. A. Foot, D. Ritson, J. Jackson, P. Black, A. J. Niven and W. Bancroft.

Germany. Deutscher Eisenbahnerverband (membership 300,000). Representatives : W. Feddern, F. Scheffel, H. Jochade and F. Apitsch.

France. Fédération Nationale des Cheminots (membership 100,000). Representatives : M. Bidegaray and L. Guillez.

Holland. Ned. Ver. van Spoor-en (membership 20,500). Representatives : P. Moltmaker and N. Nathans.

Luxemburg. Fédération Nationale des Cheminots Luxembourg (membership 7,000). Representatives : M. Stark and M. Keick.

Sweden. Svenska Jarnfagsmannaforbund (membership 40,000). Representative : F. W. Franzen.

Denmark. Dansk Jernbaneförbund (membership 10,000). Representative : C. Anderson.

Austria. Gewerkschaft der Eisenbahner Oesterreichs, (membership 86,000). Representative, J. Temschik.

Belgium. C. P. T. T. H. de Belgique (membership 83,500). Representatives : J. Bouwens and G. Vandespiegele.

A. Ringdahl, representing Federation of Scandinavian Locomotive-men, comprising Sweden, Denmark and Norway (membership, 9,500).

R. Williams (President) and E. Fimmen (Secretary), International Transport Workers' Federation.

Mr. R. Williams (president of the International Transport Workers' Federation), in opening the conference, said that this international conference of railway workers' organisations was the third of its kind which had been held. The first was held in Milan in 1900, and the second in Paris in 1906. The constitution of the International Transport Workers' Federation had been remodelled, and one of the first provisions in the new constitution had been to arrange that the several sections included in the Federation should be allowed a large measure of autonomy in order to deal with their own technical conditions. The constitution provided that sections like the seafaring workers and the railway workers and the dock and waterside organisations should have their own sectional conferences, and the present conference was being held under that system.

He stated that Mr. J. H. Thomas would conduct the proceedings, as head of the railwaymen's organisation and on behalf of the International Transport Federation.

Mr. Edo Fimmen (Secretary of the International Federation of Trade Unions and of the International Transport Federation), explained the constitution of the conference, pointing out that the 35 delegates (some of whom were not in attendance at the moment), represented nine countries and 1,357,900 workers.

The Rt. Hon. J. H. Thomas, M. P. welcomed the delegates, and stated that the success of the railway movement in England had been due to the fact that they had amalgamated. He stated that a measure of their success was to be found in the improved standard of comfort in the homes of their members. He attached great importance to the Conference because it emphasized the need of international brotherhood. If the workers of the world had known each other before 1914, the world would not have had to pass through what it had just passed through. He pointed out that in England the railwaymen had not reached the end of their fight. They were proud of the solidarity that existed among their 500,000 members, but he was sure that there would be a big struggle during the next few months on the question of sharing in railway control. The railwaymen had succeeded in reducing their hours and in increasing their wages, but they believed, in addition, that they could contribute something to the efficiency of railway management. They believed that railwaymen by their experience could do much to help to improve their transport system, and there were railway problems on the managerial side which it would be better for the men to know all about. He referred to the White Paper in which the Government indicated its view that the railwaymen must share in management, and he stated the intention of the railwaymen to hold the Government to its promise. He

welcomed the Conference as indicating that labour was realizing its power, that it was realizing that it is not insular, local, or national, but is genuinely international, and is prepared to contribute to solving the world's problems.

Hours of Labour.

A lengthy discussion then took place on the application of the 8 hour working day on the railways. Mr. Bidegaray (France) began by stating that the 8 hour day was secured to them by the terms of the Peace Treaty. The International Labour Conference at Washington decided that an 8 hour day should be worked on the railways, and referred it back to the different countries for them to apply in accordance with local circumstances.

Unfortunately, he said, various countries had endeavoured to back out of the obligation. A referendum had taken place on the subject in Switzerland, and after much agitation it had been decided, by a considerable majority, to introduce the 8 hour day on the Swiss railways. On the other hand, the 8 hour day was not yet a *fait accompli* in Belgium, and attempts were being made to avoid giving effect to the obligations contracted at Washington. In Germany, certain modifications had been introduced, and no attempt had been made so far in Spain to apply the principle of the 8 hour day to railwaymen. He said that there was now no doubt at all that the reactionary elements in all countries were endeavouring to set one section of the working-class against the other, and even to go still further and set one country against another. In view of this it would be well, he said, if every delegation were to inform the Congress of the position of the labour movement in the country it represented, more especially with reference to the railways.

With regard to France, the principle of the 8 hour day for railwaymen had been accepted. But the railwaymen had to be increasingly on the alert to frustrate attempts to avoid giving effect to the obligations entered into at Washington.

Mr. Franz Scheffel (Germany), said that the application of the 8-hour day to the railways in Germany was the outcome of the revolution. After the revolution the legislature passed an Act which gave to all workers, including the railway workers, a working day of 8 hours. That Act applied not only to the State railways, but to the privately owned concerns. Under the provisions of the Act, the railway workers had to work 208 hours per month, but certain modifications were made to meet the needs of different localities. Reaction had, however, set in against the concessions that had been made to the workers, and attempts were being made both in Parliament and in the Press to secure the reversal of the present policy. A vigorous

propaganda was being conducted to obtain a lengthening of working hours. The agitation had in view in the first place the position of the State-owned railways, and owed its origin to the large annual deficit on the working of the German State-owned railways, which amounts altogether to 16 million marks. He said that he was not at all sure whether they would be able to retain the 8 hour day in Germany, but they would not part with it without a very grim struggle.

Dealing with the question of socialization, he said that German workers were fully prepared to work longer hours, but that they were not prepared to do this in pursuit of any other object than socialization.

Mr. Scheffel referred also to bureaucratic difficulties in Germany. He stated that the juristic element was still very strong amongst the State officials. There were many officials who had no knowledge at all of railway work and management and were therefore unfit to act as railway officials. He had no wish to see the equivalent of Works Councils set up on the railways. These Councils were too narrow in their scope to satisfy the aspirations of the German railway worker. He wanted to see the right of the railwaymen to a proper share in management admitted. He did not care for working-class co-partnership, but he did care for working-class management of the railways. The principle of the Works Council was a good enough one, but it must be so developed that the workmen could get right into the management and right behind the administration and dominate concerns.

Mr. J. Bouwens (Belgium) stated that in spite of the split that had taken place in Belgian labour organisation, the Railway Union represented 120,000 workers. He maintained that it was the solidarity of their organisation which was responsible for the successful fight which was being waged in Belgium on behalf of the 8 hour working day. An endeavour was being made in Belgium to arrange that no more than 48 hours should be worked in any week, and not more than 10 hours on any one day. He stated that he regretted to report that certain railwaymen had gone behind the backs of their organisation and were lending themselves to exploitation by private employers. Mr. Bouwens agreed with the Chairman's statement of the position, that after working their 8 hours, railwaymen in Belgium were taking other employment in a private capacity, as was also being done in Germany, and added that they were going to use the boycott against such people. He said that if the present Minister of Railways in Belgium were as friendly as his predecessor there would be no difficulty in the matter of introducing joint management of the railways.

The Chairman then said that the decision of the Congress on the question of the 8 hour working day might be summarized

by placing on record a resolution affirming its belief in the principle, deprecating the action of any railway employee taking private employment after having completed his railway work, welcoming the fact that the 8 hour day was now almost universal in application, and urging their comrades in any country in which there was an abuse of the 8 hour day to use their industrial power in order to prevent it.

Mr. J. Temschik (Austria) referred to the great alteration which had taken place in the condition of the Austrian railways since the war. Before the war there were 20,000 kilometres of railway in Austria, whereas in the present so-called German Austria there were only about 5,000 kilometres of railway. Before the war the Austrian railways employed 300,000 railwaymen; to-day only 105,000 were employed, and there was still, unfortunately, a surplus of staff. He stated that attempts were being made through the Reparations Commission to shelve the 8 hour working day. One of the tasks of this Commission was to investigate the economic circumstances of Austria. In its report it had recommended the lengthening of the working day to something beyond 8 hours. The Reparations Commission further desired to introduce economies on the railway system, and it had suggested a reduction of staff as one way of gaining that end. The prolongation of the working day would enable the railway authorities to bring about the proposed reduction in staff.

Mr. P. Moltmaker (Holland) said that in 1918 a law was enacted in Holland regulating the working hours of working people generally, under which the Government was compelled to introduce an 8-hour day and to guarantee the maintenance of a 45-hour week. These provisions applied to all workers with the exception of railway workers. For them a special law had been passed under which 96 hours were worked in general in the course of a fortnight. Mr. Moltmaker referred to the difficulties of the Dutch railwaymen's organisation in view of the differences between the various organisations of workpeople. He said that the total membership of the railwaymen's unions in the country, including those employed on the tramways, was 45,000. Of these 20,500 were organised in the unions recognized by the International Transport Workers' Federation, and 16,000 were organised in the Catholic and Christian labour organisations. Whenever they tried to improve their working conditions in Holland, the Christian and Catholic organisations joined the Government in opposing them in their efforts for the betterment of the conditions of the workers.

Mr. F. W. Franzen (Sweden) stated that in Scandinavia there was an 8 hour day, giving a working month of 208 hours for all workers other than railway servants, and for most of the latter. There were slight differences between Sweden, Norway and Denmark, but it was not necessary to go into detail with regard to them. In Scandinavia the railwaymen wished

to shorten the working day to one of 7 hours. With regard to the co-operation of the workmen in the direction of the railways, the Swedish Government had appointed a Joint Committee to look after the roads on the State railways.

Mr. Eick (Luxemburg) stated that in his country there was only one labour organisation, but 99 % of the railwaymen were members of it. Until the Armistice they were more or less under the influence of Germany, and they also profited by the revolution in that country, with the result that from November 12th, 1918 they had had an 8 hour day in Luxemburg. He also mentioned that Luxemburg had passed an Act authorizing the setting up of Works Councils, on which the workmen were directly represented, and through which they had a share in the management of the various undertakings.

A motion was then carried placing on record the appreciation of the railwaymen of what had been done by the International Transport Workers' Federation and the International Railwaymen's Congress, and urging all comrades to continue to press for the rigid maintenance of the 8 hour day.

Standardization of Working Conditions.

A discussion then took place on the question of the standardization of working conditions for all grades of railwaymen. Mr. P. Moltmaker (Holland) stated that the question of standardization was a complex and difficult one. This work would have to be tackled in the future. He did not suggest that they should endeavour to grapple with all the intricacies of such a great problem as standardization, but that they should indicate the desirability of adopting the principle of standardization in such matters, for instance, as wages, hours of labour, and the social status of railwaymen. He invited the conference to consider whether it would not be possible to propose that the losses which had been suffered on the railway in every country should be divided internationally. In this way they would be paying a tribute to the true principle of internationalism.

Mr. J. H. Thomas criticized the speech of Mr. Moltmaker, and emphasized the difficulties of international standardization. He pointed out that in Great Britain a Committee had been trying for nearly two years to settle the question of standardization on their own railways and they had not yet settled it. Further, he was not optimistic as to the possibility of international sharing of losses on railways. In particular he pointed out that the annual deficit on the English railways was £ 38,000,000. He asked those who were in favour of international standardization to explain exactly what they meant by it. Did they mean that the goods worker in England was to be brought to the same level as the man doing similar

work in Austria, or did they mean that the engine driver in Austria was to be brought to the level of the driver in this country ? He declared that the railwaymen should show themselves capable of applying their minds to the real difficulties to be overcome, and not merely suggest Utopian schemes.

Mr. J. Bouwens (Belgium) advocated that when questions of this kind were on the agenda reports should be presented to the delegates, so that the delegates might know what was in the minds of the proposers, and could therefore prepare themselves for practical discussion.

Mr. F. Scheffel (Germany) stated that in Germany they had succeeded in coming to an agreement with the Government not only as to wages but also as to hours, legal status, holidays, sickness, and similar questions. They had also succeeded in reducing the number of wage classes in existence in the railway service. Instead of 23 classes which were in existence in Germany before the Revolution, there were now only 7 classes. He stated, further, that it was absolutely necessary to secure an agreement between the various branches of the Transport Workers' Federation in Germany, so that railway workers and transport workers could co-operate in any movement to obtain better conditions. Their aim was the combination of all transport workers in one Traffic Union, which would embrace all those engaged in transport and traffic, and include sailors, those engaged on canal shipping, railwaymen, transport workers, as well as those who worked on air transport.

Mr. E. G. Anderson (Great Britain) gave an account of the progress that had been made in England on the question of standardization. As a result of their work they had reduced the number of grades from something like 700 to less than 100. Their object was to standardize upwards to the highest point, if possible. They had not been successful in that, but they had been able to standardize on the average rate of wages. They had experienced another difficulty in standardization, namely, the existence of hybrid grades, that is to say, men who are doing a little of one sort of work and a little of another. They had succeeded to a certain extent in eliminating these hybrid grades.

Mr. P. Moltmaker (Holland) maintained that although the standardization of wages internationally was for the time being, at any rate, an impossibility, yet they could proceed in that direction by collecting information in regard to such things as payment in the case of sickness, wherever any such payment is made; whether holidays are given to railway workers with pay and for what periods; whether Courts of Arbitration have been set up and what are their powers and constitution. When information was collected on these subjects it would be possible to draw conclusions which would form the basis of further efforts.

Mr. Moltmaker then withdrew his original resolution.

After a brief discussion on the question of the transport of munitions of war to Poland, the Conference discussed the question of automatic couplings.

Automatic Couplings.

Mr. Bidegaray showed a model of an automatic coupling which was already in use on the railway between Paris and Versailles. He maintained that the coupling should be applied internationally and that this was one of the practical things that could be done internationally. He stated that in its last Budget France had voted several millions of francs with the object of discovering a good system of coupling, and this was the best that had been devised.

The Chairman then said that in England there was a small Committee, called the Safety Appliances Committee, of which the President of the Board of Trade, a railway General Manager, and himself were members. They met regularly to test all appliances calculated to reduce accidents on railways. They had tried scores of automatic couplings. He considered that the proper way of approaching the question was to get couplings adopted in particular countries first. If Mr. Bidegaray considered that his automatic coupling was suitable for the French railways, he should put it before the French Government with that end in view.

The Chairman then remarked that it would be one of the best features of internationalism if, in addition to statistics of conditions of service, they could get some figures with regard to accidents to railway employees in each country. It would show that the relative proportion of accidents not only differed from country to country, but that there is considerable misapprehension as to the accidents that really arise out of coupling operations.

Mr. Bidegaray stated that the particular coupling which he had demonstrated to the Congress could be used not only in France but everywhere in Central Europe. In view of the forthcoming Railwaymen's Conference at Geneva in April 1921, he proposed to carry out a series of experiments with the coupling.

A motion was then adopted as follows :—

That this Conference urges upon the respective Governments the necessity of adopting all safety appliances in order to reduce the loss of life from accidents among railway servants".

A demonstration of signalling apparatus was then given by Mr. Bidegaray, and discussion took place.

The question of the internationalization of railways had been proposed by the Netherlands Railway Union, but Mr. Moltmaker withdrew the motion, and deferred it until the 1921 meeting of the Conference.

Mr. Edo Fimmen said that he had just received a letter from Vienna to the effect that ten Commissaries, who were left behind when the Bolshevik régime broke down in Budapest, and who remained there at the request of the representatives of the Entente countries, had been sentenced to death. It was agreed that the Conference should protest vigorously against the murder of their comrades, and express its unanimous support of the petition which was to be sent to the Hungarian Government in the hope of saving the lives of these ten men.

STUDIES AND REPORTS

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**INTERNATIONAL LABOUR
OFFICE**

GENEVA

3 May 1921.

Studies and Reports

Series A.

No. 21.

**The Programme and Organization
of the Christian Trade Unions of Germany**

(Congress at Essen 20-24 November 1920)

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The congress held at Essen on 21 November 1920 by the unions of Christian workers of Germany marks a new epoch in the history of these unions. The last ordinary congress was held at Dresden before the war, on 6 October 1912. A period of eight years, therefore, separates the two congresses. In the course of this long period, important events had happened, tending to define and even to modify the evolution of the Christian trade unions of Germany. It is essential to analyse the character and indicate the consequences of these events before showing from the speeches and discussions at Essen the present programme of the Christian trade unions.